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The CEC has undertaken the task of conducting personal interviews with many of Sangamon County's mayors and village presidents.

Important themes from these conversations include:

- 1) Many municipalities and townships cooperate most frequently on an informal basis when opportunities arise and resource constraints allow.
- 2) Smaller municipalities in Sangamon County suggest that their resources are very limited as compared to their needs.
- 3) While most municipalities seemed open to the ideas for efficiency posed by the CEC, they often seemed to lack resources or a formal venue in which to actively or independently seek out new opportunities for cooperation.

Subjects addressed by local mayors in the course of the interviews included current cooperative efforts, emergency services, equipment sharing, infrastructure needs, and other village challenges.

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Preliminary Report: Sangamon County Municipal Leader Interviews

Introduction

One aspect of the Citizens' Efficiency Commission's (CEC) mission includes improving cooperation and communication among units of local government in Sangamon County. In order to develop a more complete understanding of current operations of the villages and cities in the County, the CEC determined that it would be beneficial to meet individually with the chief executive and/or administrator of each city or village.

One of the Sangamon County villages' appointees to the CEC, Mr. Robert Plunk, initiated these conversations. Because they represent an investment of time from both the CEC and village presidents, these interviews have taken place gradually over the course of the last several months. At the time of this report, 11 of the 26 municipal leaders had been interviewed. The observations below represent a preliminary summary of the information the CEC has required concerning local operations, particularly intergovernmental cooperative activities.

Themes

Major themes addressed in a number of the mayoral meetings include:

- 1) Many municipalities and townships cooperate most frequently on an informal basis when opportunities arise and resource constraints allow.
- 2) Smaller municipalities in Sangamon County suggest that their resources are very limited as compared to their needs.
- 3) While most municipalities seemed open to the ideas for efficiency posed by the CEC, they often seemed to lack resources or a formal venue in which to actively seek out new cooperative efficiencies.

Cooperation Examples

The CEC intended in these interviews primarily to inquire about local municipalities' existing cooperative efforts and agreements. The CEC expected that hearing about formal and informal intergovernmental agreements would spark additional ideas for cooperative efforts by localities.

In terms of formal intergovernmental cooperation, village presidents alluded to both one-time consolidations and mergers and on-going efforts. For instance, one village discussed the consolidation of two school districts in its region. Several mayors

mentioned the cooperative street sign grant program for retro-reflective signs, in which many Sangamon County communities were participants. One village described one-time programs in which it worked with its neighboring township to provide storm radios and flu shots to both jurisdictions' residents. Another purchased recycling bins collectively with its neighboring township at a reduced bulk price. Each of these occurrences, while representing a formal intergovernmental cooperative effort, occurred on a one-time basis.

Other formalized efforts take the form of annual or recurring agreements. For example, one village shares office space with its library district and park space with its school district, and another shares space with its neighboring township. Local law enforcement and emergency service providers share mutual aid under the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) agreement. Some villages have worked out practical jurisdiction trade-offs with Sangamon County or the State of Illinois for segments of road that can be covered more efficiently by one entity or the other. Finally, some mayors and presidents noted that they get water from the City of Springfield.

Other cooperative efforts take place on an informal basis, without a legal mechanism. One village plows property after snowfalls for a local special district, without an agreement in place to formalize this activity. Some neighboring villages share administrative advice, replicate resolution and agreement templates, and respond to one another's questions. Occasionally, townships or neighboring villages will meet a village's unique needs, as in the case of one village whose neighboring townships helped with electric and construction work on a village park.

Finally, the CEC observed as a result of these interviews that emergency situations often serve as a catalyst in intergovernmental cooperation. All mayors involved indicated that they are willing to help out in a situation of emergency need. Several cited their attempts to assist with equipment after the recent tornado on the north side of the county. One mayor expressed deep gratitude at services provided after a similar natural disaster. Another noted an occasion where his village provided water by truck to another village when its water source was nonfunctional for a period of time.

Major Concepts

In addition to the cooperation examples cited above, the interviews dealt with numerous other issues of concern to local mayors. While the CEC asked some specific questions related to its research findings, it also invited mayors to discuss whatever concerns they felt were important or relevant.

Equipment

Nearly all mayors/presidents interviewed discussed some instance of equipment sharing with other units of local government. Villages described a range of equipment sharing activities with neighboring townships spanning from limited, occasional interaction to frequent sharing, or even shared maintenance facilities, jointly-owned equipment, and cross-trained personnel. Village presidents frequently cited sharing a specialized piece of equipment with a nearby municipality, usually with an accompanying operator. Occasionally, village presidents discussed instances of sharing equipment with local school districts or special districts. One also indicated that, in addition to road

maintenance equipment, the village shared police equipment with a nearby community.

It should be noted that in most instances, mayors reported that villages share equipment on an informal, as-needed basis. They expressed a desire to maintain local discretion about when to share equipment, which equipment to share, and whether to loan an employee with valuable or specialized equipment.

The village presidents mentioned a number of equipment needs. Most have a minimal array of trucks, backhoes, and other large equipment. Several mayors discussed aging equipment that would soon need to be replaced. One affirmed that an equipment inventory of all local jurisdictions would be valuable in making decisions about purchasing versus borrowing equipment. Another expressed a desire to work with the Sangamon County Highway Department on materials purchases. Some discussed their revenue sources for public works equipment, which included Motor Fuel Tax funds, grants, and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds.

Five municipal leaders indicated that they contract out for oil and chip work each year, though one specified that the village had had difficulties with its contractor and the quality of the work provided.

Only two of the 11 village presidents interviewed thus far mentioned instances of non-cooperation related to equipment sharing. One of these instances was a village president who struggled to cooperate with the neighboring township. He suggested that these difficulties generally resulted from personality differences among those involved. Another village expressed that they interacted very little with the County Highway Department.

Emergency Response and Law Enforcement

The CEC and village leaders also considered emergency response and law enforcement in many interviews. Overall, village presidents described a mix of part time and volunteer public safety forces, some units of which function more effectively than others.

Several municipal leaders voiced concerns with declining volunteerism and response times for local volunteer fire protection and emergency medical services. The CEC heard concerns about volunteerism specifically in the northern and southern regions of the county. The western region expressed difficulties with some emergency telecommunications equipment as well. One village on the west side of the county mentioned using the Sangamon County Rescue Squad for emergencies, and felt that it was an effective body. Another village president indicated that he would like to see four regionalized districts responsible for fire and emergency response throughout the county, possibly with paid employees.

Related to law enforcement, some leaders raised concerns about the Sheriff's office's response times in the outlying county. One president expressed satisfaction with a part-time, after-hours arrangement to have Sheriff's deputies cover his village, while another challenged this practice and expressed concerns with its effectiveness and safety.

Infrastructure Needs

Among its many topics of study, the CEC is considering joint purchasing and borrowing opportunities for villages. The municipal interviews served as an opportunity to hear what village's upcoming capital needs will be. For instance, one village president noted that the village will soon need a new sewer system, and another discussed limitations in his budget for resurfacing roads. One village is currently working to pay off bonds for a new water plant. Another faces concerns about drainage, and anticipates needing a new culvert for drainage near a rail crossing.

In addition to special projects, mayors described some of their villages' basic infrastructure systems, and noted a few concerns with infrastructure. Some villages own their own water and gas distribution systems and/or water plants, while others do not. One area in the southern region of the county had had issues with its telecommunications infrastructure.

Other

Other topics of discussion that arose occasionally in the municipal interviews included:

- Grants received by local villages, such as Safe Routes to School funding, Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants, DCEO funds for equipment purchase, and infrastructure funding.
- Waste hauling regulation and road maintenance concerns.
- Creating and funding new village parks.
- Employment opportunities and village residents working primarily in Springfield.
- Electric aggregation questions and steps forward.
- Existing village comprehensive plans.
- Funding for village libraries or library districts.
- Records retention and village difficulties with the time needed to adequately review, manage, and maintain old records.
- Building code adoption and enforcement, and the status of codes in the villages.
- Village employee health insurance costs and sharing opportunities.
- A local mayors' peer network.
- Development-ready land within villages, and long-term land use goals.
- Village management of technological issues through contracting information systems work out.

Conclusions

Each of these comments and suggestions from the local leaders merits consideration and review. Although they have been categorized and described based on the amount of discussion they received in the overall pool of municipal interviews, each of the mayors' responses and ideas can play a role in sharpening the CEC's understanding of local issues.

Many leaders addressed equipment sharing activities, infrastructure needs, and public safety concerns in their interviews, partially based on the questions and comments raised



by the CEC in the course of its inquiry. The CEC anticipates that the mayors' suggestions will prove fruitful in the research already underway on these topics. Additionally, the CEC anticipates including inquiries in future interviews based on the other miscellaneous topics village presidents/mayors raised during this preliminary round of interviews.

The CEC's work toward efficiencies is a cumulative effort. Every incremental increase in CEC understanding of issues related to current local cooperation and future local needs will assist commissioners in developing better recommendations to improve the tapestry of local government interactions in Sangamon County. This preliminary report and the interviews it summarizes and compiles will play an important role in the CEC's efficiency and collaboration conversations. The report is intended not only to inform the full CEC and others of the outcome of one-on-one municipal interviews to date, but to identify themes and summarize important responses from local mayors and village presidents.

The CEC had the sense of three main themes as an outgrowth of its conversations. They include: that many localities cooperate frequently on an informal basis when opportunities arise, that municipalities are faced with limited resources, and that municipalities may benefit from a stronger forum or more resources to pursue cooperative activities. Through interviewing municipal leaders and helping to initiate the establishment of a mayors' peer network, the CEC is attempting to pursue more efficient and effective avenues for meeting these needs in local municipalities.